



Bell's Miniature Series of Painters

REMBRANDT VAN RYN

BY

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'TUSCAN ARTISTS: THEIR THOUGHT AND WORK,'

"DONATELLO," ETC.



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LIFE OF REMBRANDT .

THE year 1606 is now generally accepted by authorities as the date of Rembrandt's birth. He was the child of comparatively humble though sufficiently well-to-do parents, citizens of the town of Leyden, which had but a generation before earned for itself lasting fame by its heroic resistance to the forces of Spain during its memorable siege.

Rembrandt's father, Harmen Gerritsz, was a miller by trade, successful in business, and respected by his fellow-townsmen. His mother, Neeltje, if we may judge from the almost numberless portraits, studies, and sketches made of her by her son, must have been a worthy partner to the shrewd and alert miller, Van Ryn, and of a character calculated to win and retain both affection and respect.

It is probable that Harmen Gerritsz, in his early boyhood, had himself passed through the memorable days of the great siege; at any rate, one hears an echo of the town's old patriot spirit in his recorded wish that Rembrandt should "learn the Latin tongue in preparation for the university of Leyden,

that when he came of age he might by his knowledge serve the city and the Republic."

In accordance with this paternal desire, we find that at the age of fourteen young Rembrandt was entered as a student of the university. One year, however, sufficed to show indubitably that his was not a brain adapted to gain knowledge by way of books, while his inclination towards art was as distinctly manifest. Harmen and Neeltje van Ryn agreed to forego their own wishes as regards their son's career, and the year's trial having been undergone, they apprenticed him to one Jacob van Swanenborch, a Leyden painter, who, during the three years in which he had the honour of being Rembrandt's master, imparted to the lad "the first elements and principles of his art."

At the conclusion of his apprenticeship, with a view to gaining further experience, young Harmensz* passed on to Amsterdam, and there entered the studio of Pieter Lastman, a painter enjoying a considerable reputation as one of the school of Dutch artists who worked directly under Italian influence.

It is possible that this step was taken by Rembrandt at the instigation of an acquaintance, Jan Lievensz, the son of a neighbouring farmer, who had in his turn served his apprenticeship under Lastman. Rembrandt, however, stayed but six months with the "Italianizer" Lastman, and then, giving as it were the key-

* *I.e.*, son of Harmen, as Gerritsz is in its turn the abbreviation of son of Gerrit.

note to the whole of his subsequent artistic career, returned home "to study and practise painting alone, and in his own way."

This bold step was taken at the age of eighteen. We hear of no opposition on the part of his parents to the unusual proceeding; indeed, though little is directly recorded of his relations with his family, we may conclude from one detail and another that there existed between them an absolute and affectionate confidence which ended only with life.

Of the nature of his studies during the first three years at home we can only guess, as not a single work done before the year 1627, when he was twenty-one, has been preserved. It has been suggested that he himself, when removing to Amsterdam in 1631, destroyed the earliest of his studies and experiments. Be that as it may, the first authentic work from his hand now in existence bears the date 1627. From then to 1632 we have the remarkable output of sixty-two paintings, besides twenty-six etchings. It is upon the number, character, and subjects of these works that we may gather some idea of the painter rather than from any definitely written record. Rembrandt himself seems to have used his pen as little as was possible throughout his life, while contemporary references to him are most scanty. We may gather, however, from evidence supplied by Picture Galleries and Collections that the years passed by the young painter at home were spent in most ardent and

strenuous study, surrounded by a group of equally enthusiastic, if less gifted, students working with him, sharing his models and, indeed, his life in a way never again repeated in later years. Of these fellow-workers the principal was Jan Lievensz, who became a close and personal friend. In 1628 Gerard Dou joined the company, though in the capacity of Rembrandt's pupil. The most constant models who sat for this eager band were apparently the members of Rembrandt's own family. With a patience and adaptability that seem to have been unfailing they gave their services in every possible position, guise, and light. Not counting the etchings, to which, as above noted, he gave considerable time even in these early years, we have no fewer than eight portraits of his father, and five of his mother. We find the worthy miller, with his keen eyes, somewhat sharp features, and work-worn face, studied carefully in undress, and again fantastically attired in polished armour or plumed hat, gazing almost truculently out of the canvas, calling up for his son, as best he might, 'an expression to harmonize with his strange garments. His mother also appears in as varying fashions; twice she is reading—once obviously from the Bible—once again as the prophetess Anna, and once in such stately pose and dress that the portrait has become known to students as the *Countess Desmond*.

One other unfailing model Rembrandt had always at hand, but presumably for his own



Hanfstängl photo. |

| *National Galler;*

PORTRAIT OF REMBRANDT (1640).

use alone; eight times in this Leyden period he painted his own portrait, treating himself with even greater freedom than he did his complaisant family; for not only did he dress himself to suit as many characters as he painted pictures, but he experimented continuously and more exactly in expression and effects of light and shadow. This was a practice in which he persevered until the end of his career. The full catalogue of these self-studies presents a curious medley of moods and fancies. We have *Rembrandt with Frizzled Hair*, *Rembrandt with Moustaches*, *Rembrandt Laughing*, *Rembrandt with Haggard Eyes*, and so on almost interminably. In fact, this lifelong series of portraits gives us in some sort a history of the painter's development, not only in his art, but in his life and character.

In 1631 the busy and presumably happy group of students was finally disbanded. Lievensz had left Leyden the previous year, invited to England, it is said, by the King, Charles I., who, having had specimens of his work brought before his notice, had been struck by their merit. The old miller Gerritsz had died in 1630; moreover, commissions beginning to come in to Rembrandt from Amsterdam, he decided to establish a permanent studio there, and accordingly bade good-bye to his old home, and life of careless youth, to take up the position of master-painter in the busy capital city, which at that time was growing in wealth and importance year by year.

In 1632 he received a commission of first importance, which, when completed, made his name, and still stands supreme among all other paintings of its class in the Dutch School. This was the celebrated *Anatomy Lesson*.

In order to appreciate this painting at its proper value, something of the circumstances under which it was painted must be understood, and the public attitude of mind which demanded such a work taken into account.

Slowly and surely for over two generations Holland had been emancipating herself from the oppression of the kings and regents of Spain, and with her freedom there sprang up a glorious and exuberant national life, expressing itself in a boundless energy on all sides—in war, in adventure overseas, in domestic development, in scholarship and in art,—until the eyes of all Europe were turned to the little sea-dyked corner, occupied by the United Provinces, as to the pioneer land of liberty and progress, in thought as in life. Science, and particularly medical science, made great strides, and as a consequence scientific dissection of the human body came to be recognised as a necessity to the proper study of anatomy. With the curious lack of sensibility in certain realms of sentiment which, with all their virtues, marked the Netherlanders at that time, admission to the anatomy theatres was not confined to the students, but the demonstrations of the professors became semi-public, fashionable functions, frequented by gentlemen and ladies who

had no professional connection whatsoever with the medical school. The theatres themselves grew to be museums, and as time went on were decorated by portraits of celebrated surgeons.

It was in accordance with this prevailing sentiment that these doctors should be portrayed in that act which constituted their chief claim to celebrity; thus the so-called "Anatomy pieces" were frequently demanded of the painters, in which the surgeon, surrounded by his students and public, was actually engaged in the dissection of a corpse.

Gruesome enough to modern eyes are these specimens of the painter's craft. Rembrandt alone was able to transfuse the grim subject with artistic value and distinction.

By the elimination of all ghastly details, and concentration of interest on the noble figure of the demonstrator,—the famous Dr. Tulp,—Rembrandt at once brings dignity into the conception. The seven men grouped before him are life-like presentations of the investigator at work; one and all are intent on the demonstration—not, as it were, posing for their portraits—and thus each is made an integral part of the composition as a whole. The corpse is emphasized as little as ever the subject could allow, while it is the arm alone which is robbed of the dignity of death by the operator's scalpel.

So complete was the triumph of Rembrandt in this work that he leaped at one bound into the foremost rank among the painters of Amster-

dam, and was almost overpowered by commissions for portraits and applications for admission to his studio by younger artists.

His treatment of these pupils was like everything else about him, different from that of other masters of his day. It is said that he arranged the upper story of his house for their accommodation, partitioning it up into little boxes by screens of canvas or paper, so that each student might work alone without interruption, and with full opportunity to preserve and develop his own artistic individuality. In this school he kept strict order and decorum, besides setting an example in his own person of complete absorption in his art. "He lived very simply," wrote Houbraken concerning him, "and when at work contented himself with a herring or a piece of cheese and bread"; while "when he was painting he would not have given audience to the greatest monarch on earth, but would have compelled even such an one to wait, or to come again when he was at leisure."

He does not appear to have made any use of his pupils as helpers in his work, after the fashion of his day. Such a course would indeed have been entirely destructive to the special character of his art, which was individual in the highest degree. His pupils were, however, called upon for service in other ways from time to time, and we read of them occasionally undertaking outside business for their master, whose dislike to commercial affairs and small



Hanfstangl photo.

Dresden Gallery.

PORTRAIT OF SASKIA (1641).

capacity therein made him, perhaps, only too ready to shift that particular class of duty on to any shoulders willing to bear it.

In the same year which saw the completion of the *Anatomy Lesson*, the young master was brought under the notice of the Stadholder Maurice, son of the great patriot, William the Silent, and of him he painted a portrait. His successor and brother, Prince Frederick Henry, also became a purchaser of Rembrandt's work about this time, but chose two Biblical subjects—*The Elevation of the Cross*, and *The Descent from the Cross*. The Prince's secretary, Constantin Huygens, a man of wide cultivation and artistic sympathy, had made the acquaintance of Rembrandt's work in his Leyden period, and had written of him and his friend Jan Lievensz as being, even at that date, "beardless and yet famous." To him, probably, was due Rembrandt's introduction to the Stadholder.

It is quite in accordance with his character as above indicated that we find no evidence that Rembrandt allowed himself to be in any way lionized on account of his fame; on the contrary, he withdrew more and more to his studio, and became increasingly absorbed in his art, the enormous output of work at this time pointing to the most concentrated and strenuous labour. "When I want rest for my wits," he is said to have remarked, "it is not honours I crave, but liberty."

One friendship, however, was allowed to ripen into a closer bond. Many of these

studious hours were spent in painting the fresh young girlish face of Saskia, cousin of his neighbour and friend, Hendrick van Uylenborch, an art dealer of the town. The attraction became mutual, and in 1634 Rembrandt brought Saskia van Uylenborch to his home as his bride. There is abundant evidence that the union of the painter and Saskia was one of complete happiness and mutual confidence. But the life of the master, alas! resembled but too closely the character of his works, in which we find, as it were, captured sunbeams, but thrown up by a whole realm of shadows.

Saskia brightened her husband's life for but eight years. In 1642, after a gradual fading away of strength, she was taken from him. Of four children born to them, one only, the last, survived, and three times in this short period the two were left childless, while in 1640 the Painter's much-loved mother also died in Leyden.

Meantime, absorbed in the problems of his art, his unremitting labours, and the joys and sorrows of his home circle, Rembrandt allowed confusion to creep into and fasten upon his business affairs. He made large sums of money, but seemed to have had innate incapacity to manage it when made. In 1639 he decided on buying a commodious house in which to make a final settlement for Saskia and himself, to accommodate his pupils, and bestow conveniently his rapidly-growing collection of art treasures, curiosities from over the seas, and studio properties. His purchases of this order were

on an extensive scale, while he seemed unable to resist lavishing dress and jewels of the richest upon his child-wife Saskia.

Baldinucci, a Florentine writer who derived his information from one of the master's pupils, records that "when Rembrandt was present at a sale it was his habit, especially when pictures or drawings by great masters were put up, to make an enormous advance on the first bid, which generally silenced all competitors. To those who expressed their surprise at such a proceeding he replied that by these means he hoped to raise the status of his profession."

We may safely believe that such was indeed genuinely this dreamer's idea, as generous as it was unpractical; it is entirely in character with the rest of his all too scantily recorded life. We read, for example, that these art treasures so magnificently purchased were apparently but held in trust for Art's sake. "He willingly," adds Baldinucci, "lent all his possessions to artists who required them for their works;" and again: "He was to be admired not less for his noble devotion to his art than for a kindness of heart verging on extravagance."

The new house in the Joden Breestraat was recently built and a valuable property, but so exactly suiting his requirements that Rembrandt determined to be its possessor, though unable to put down the full purchase-money at once. His prospects, however, appeared good, and the owner agreed to accept payment by

instalments. So while continuing to cultivate habits of reckless expenditure, as above indicated, in addition he placed upon his shoulders the burden of a considerable debt. Money was, however, coming in steadily, and it was naturally impossible for him to foresee a turn of fortune's wheel which would cast him from the forefront of fashion with the art public of Amsterdam to the far background, in the eyes of all but a faithful few. Yet this is what, in fact, occurred, and must be always taken into account when meting out judgment to Rembrandt for his dealings as a citizen.

Among the guilds of the Dutch cities, the Civic Guards held a foremost place, and while in Flanders these remained still religious organizations, in the Independent Provinces, where the new Protestantism had swept away the older tradition in so many fields of thought and manners, these military guilds became purely patriotic and municipal associations. Consequently, when they wished for decoration in their Guildhalls, they had no desire for religious or allegorical compositions, but demanded "Corporation pieces," or large portrait groups of their own martial selves, with their captains and officers, their gay costumes, their banners, their loving cup, and festive fare. A subscription was levied upon the company to pay for these Corporation pieces, and each man paying a share expected his portrait duly to appear in the painting.

The early Corporation pieces were frankly a



Hanfstängl photo.

THE SHIPRUIDER AND HIS WIFE (1633).

Buckingham Palace.

series of portraits, sometimes merely a double row of men, one showing above the other, as though standing on a form behind, with no more attempt at composition than that displayed in an ordinary photograph of a football team or cricket eleven. Even the great Franz Hals, who painted the most celebrated pictures of this class, as may be seen in the museum of Haarlem, though he produced glorious compositions, with glowing schemes of colour and varied pose and characteristic gesture, never deviated from the accepted understanding that each man must have a full portrait of himself.

In the early part of the fatal year 1642, during the captaincy of Franz Banning Cocq, Rembrandt received the commission to paint a Corporation piece to serve as decoration for the newly-erected hall of the Amsterdam musketeers. The sum agreed upon in payment for the work was 1,600 florins, a greater amount than was usually offered, each man's share being 100 florins or thereabouts, according to the prominence given him in the picture.

Careless of tradition as Rembrandt had proved himself from the outset of his career, in this instance he set himself to execute the commission more than ever "in his own way." Instead of the usual banquet scene by which Hals had made his reputation, Rembrandt chose what we cannot but consider a more characteristic moment, that of a call to arms, and he depicts the whole company in energetic haste leaving the hall at the sound of the drum

beaten in their hearing. The men are drawn full of life, and with an air of purpose and distinction in their bearing. He gathers together in his group, as it were, the spirit of resolute patriotism which was the prevailing characteristic of his time, and pays, in this presentation of one military company, his artist's tribute to their order as a whole; these, and such as these, were the men who kept the gates against such fearful odds, and held the nation in its present freedom.

But over and above this translation of a mere Corporation piece into a great subject picture, as regards action and sentiment, he worked out in a surpassingly daring manner a great problem of lights and shadows, with all the delicate gradations from one to the other. Where his scheme of shadow demanded it, he placed a gallant musketeer so far in the background as to be but dimly visible, while at one point, where it was desirable to have a full and glowing light, he introduced a little girl in fantastic dress and bedizened with jewels, which by their glitter gave that which the scheme of light made necessary. Such a detail, fulfilling excellently the artistic requirements of the case, was nevertheless open to adverse criticism in a Guild picture purporting to represent the worshipful Civic Guard. Moreover, as regards the rest of the painting, no one of the members of the company, excepting the captain and his lieutenant, could be satisfied with it from the point of view of portraiture.

Rembrandt, carried away by his vivid conception of the subject and his desire to represent it as thus conceived, had, as we have seen, flung to the winds all traditional methods. Possibly also the visibly failing health of Saskia had driven him more than ever within his own world of home and art, and in his gnawing anxiety outside opinion seemed to him as but distant voices that conveyed no intelligible meaning. Be this as it may, it was as if in a fury of nervous energy and indifference to criticism that he threw himself into the work. No preliminary sketch for it is to be found; it is thought that he made none, and only the most scanty studies for one or two figures remain. He seems to have conceived the whole in a moment of high inspiration, and carried it out in a mood of enforced concentration. Little wonder that there are the signs of storm upon it, for before it was completed Saskia died.

To-day this great work, popularly known as *The Night Watch*, dominates the Hall of Honour in the Royal Museum of Amsterdam, making everything around it look flat and meagre by comparison. Its reception, however, by the general public of 1642 was cold and even adverse.

Perhaps it was hardly to be expected that men who had paid their 100 florins for a portrait could feel that they had got their money's worth in being made mere details in a work of art, be that work never so fine. But the merits

of this work were of so novel a character that they were entirely beyond the popular power of appreciation, under which circumstances the Civic Guard must have felt itself doubly wronged.

The result of all this on Rembrandt personally could not but be disastrous. Taste had been for some time veering round towards a more delicately finished and minute style of painting, while Rembrandt, as his powers developed, grew more and more masterful, not to say Titanic, in his touch and manner.

The Night Watch hastened what had doubtless already begun, namely, a complete fall for the painter in public estimation, and consequently in patronage. So to his loneliness and grief were now added decrease of income, and with that, actual embarrassment in his business affairs.

Left with but his baby son, we have no expression of grief recorded. Always reserved, this solitary worker kept all to himself, and we know nothing except as his art gives evidence of what passed within. The large number of landscapes painted at this period points to frequent solitary rambles in the country outside Amsterdam; while in the Biblical subjects executed at this time there is, if possible, an increase of power displayed in the expression of tenderness, pathos, and pain which is unspeakably touching when viewed in the light of contemporary circumstances.

Rembrandt retained in his service his baby's



Hong-tan, i p. 10.

Rijk Museum, Amsterdam.

THE NIGHT-WATCH 1642.

nurse, a widow woman named Geertje Dircx. For seven years she acted as general house-keeper, and continued her care of the little Titus. In 1650, however, the poor creature went mad, and her master advanced the sum to her relations necessary to place her in an asylum for the insane. Like many another loan made by the over-generous Rembrandt, it was never repaid.

In the previous year mention is made in the scanty records extant of another woman, who became thenceforward very closely connected with the painter; this was Hendrickje Stoffels, possibly a fellow-servant of Geertje Dircx, at this time about twenty-three years of age.

It can scarcely be doubted that eventually Rembrandt and Hendrickje were married; but it is, unfortunately, incontestable that at first their relations were entirely irregular. It is difficult to understand this passage in the great painter's life, so contrary to all that had gone before. Careless for himself as regards public opinion he had always been, but never as regards the claims of others when it was a question of affection or generosity. Yet on this occasion, with a callousness which we can only deplore, while sacrificing his own good name, he permitted also that of the woman who devoted herself to him to suffer. Hendrickje constituted herself his faithful partner and best friend from the day that she cast in her lot with his to that of her death.

His financial difficulties meanwhile increased,

and now reached an acute stage. After paying off instalments for his house up to one-half of the purchase-money, he found himself unable to continue, and finally ceased even to pay the interest, leaving a debt of 8,470 florins still unpaid. This, and the accumulated interest upon it, hung thenceforward like a millstone about his neck. In vain he sold Saskia's jewels; they were insufficient, and he began the futile plan of paying away with one hand what he had but borrowed with the other. It is not surprising that law proceedings were instituted against him by relations in the interests of his little son Titus, whose fortune he was accused, and with reason, of having dissipated. Appearances were all against him, and among the hard-headed Dutch merchants and traders a genius with total incapacity for business was a phenomenon difficult to understand. Some few friends still held true to him notwithstanding, and secured him a few commissions. After the painting of *The Night Watch* the Stadholder had made generous purchases, and now the Burgomaster Six and others demanded of him repeatedly both painted portraits and etchings; but without avail, except in so far as their expression of friendship may have been some consolation to his tormented mind. Nothing in the ordinary way of business could restore order to the poor artist's now hopelessly confused affairs.

To make matters worse, his brother, who had succeeded to the old mill at Leyden, came to grief, and the impoverished, debt-laden painter

was unable to resist sending what money he could to the old home, where not only his brother, but his sister, Lysbeth, were both in the greatest need.

Finally, in 1656 the crash came ; Rembrandt was declared bankrupt, and the guardianship of his son taken from him by decision of the courts. The following year his effects were sold,—house, collection, all, and the luckless artist took up his quarters at the Crown Imperial Inn in the Kalverstraat, a ruined and discredited man.

Generous to a fault, extravagant and reckless where money was concerned, Rembrandt indubitably was, but circumstances were not altogether in his favour. To be absolutely deficient in business capacity is in itself a serious drawback for a man who has only himself to look to for counsel and help. Possibly his friends found him not easy to advise, reserved, and difficult of approach, and perhaps, too, wilful when once his mind was set on any course. One person alone, we cannot but think, might have restrained his impetuosity ; but she, alas ! seems to have had the same incapacity for affairs as her husband. Poor little Saskia was apparently to Rembrandt like the Dora of Dickens' creation in his novel " David Copperfield."

Again, besides the change of fashion and taste in art already alluded to in connection with *The Night Watch*, which while it reduced the number of commissions also diminished

the prices which could be demanded for their execution, there was another serious consideration to be taken into account which may have had much to do with Rembrandt's ill-fortune, and was in no way a matter he could have controlled, however he might have been gifted.

The adventurous city of Amsterdam, challenging the whole world by land and sea in commerce as in war, created for herself financial crises from which all her citizens suffered in their turn, and of these the artists, in the nature of things, were but too likely to come first. Rembrandt was not the only Dutch master who ended his days in poverty; others, only less great than he, shared the same fate, among them Ruysdaal and even the brilliant Franz Hals, with Hobbema and Jan Steen.

Another significant fact may here be added with reference to the fluctuations of the art market during Rembrandt's lifetime. Though, as we know, he bought curios and works of art in no thrifty fashion, we may at the same time be assured that what he did buy was genuinely good of its kind, and in acquiring such possessions he must have felt that in some sort it was an investment of capital, and not only luxury and self-pleasing. Yet when this choice collection came to be sold—the pictures, the engravings, the curios—they realized but a meagre 5,000 florins. How inadequately that sum represented the real value of the goods we may realize from the fact that the price paid by

the master for one painting alone—a *Hero and Leander* by Rubens—had been 530 florins.

So Rembrandt, from his former high estate, fell indeed upon evil days. Yet not one groan was wrung from him. Steadfastly he continued to be the absorbed artist, evincing even greater power and vigour in his work than ever before. To this period belongs the celebrated portrait of his friend the Burgomaster Six, a painting before which one stands mute with admiration and amazement at the absolute mastery it displays. In 1660 we have a glimpse of the Van Ryn family, in which we may find clear indications as to the nature of their mutual relations.

Towards the end of this year Hendrickje entered into a legal partnership with Titus, now a youth of nineteen, with a view to dealing in pictures, engravings, and curiosities. It appears that the two had been associated informally in the business for over a year previously, but now they were minded to establish, if possible, a regular business. Rembrandt himself was not included in the agreement, in part, we may suppose, because, with the wolf at the door, it was useless to ignore his business incapacity, but principally to enable them to retain any possible profits, money made in Rembrandt's name being liable to be claimed by the still unsatisfied creditors. With who can say what mingled feelings the painter agreed, however, to help these two inexperienced dealers with his knowledge and advice, while they undertook to provide him with board and

lodging and "certain allowances." So once more a home was provided and a resting-place—poor certainly, but one, at any rate, where mutual affection and confidence was the prevailing atmosphere.

Of Titus we may form some idea from the numerous portraits made of him by his father. A gentle lad, with features somewhat resembling Rembrandt's own, but with the sturdy strength eliminated, the brown eyes of Titus, rather prominent than sunken, and deeply marked underneath, gaze softly out of the canvas, giving an impression of physical delicacy. His was not, perhaps, a very robust character either, one would think; yet his whole nature was one to twine itself round and about the very heartstrings of his sorely-stricken father.

Fortune's blows did not cease with mere financial ruin and complete social neglect; two significant facts with regard to his work point to the probability of an even greater calamity. After 1660 no further etchings were executed—a noticeable thing when we remember that of these from the earliest years of his art production there had been a continuous output, as rapid studies and delicately-finished plates, of portraits, landscapes, and Biblical subjects. He had been used to express himself by the etcher's tool almost as completely as by the painter's brush. In addition to this ominous cessation of so favourite a method of work, his paintings from this date were done on a larger scale than

formerly, figures and faces being alike drawn above life-size. Students of his work have been led to think from these facts that the artist's long and severely taxed sight was by this time affected, and that the shadow of possible blindness lay before him. His courage in art, however, remained undaunted. In 1661 some one of his few still admiring, or, it may be, only pitying, friends obtained for him a commission from the syndics of the Drapers' Guild. It was not only the military companies that followed the fashion of having large portrait groups painted in their own honour, but also the trade guilds and even boards of governors of charities of various kinds. These latter were called "Regent Pieces," as distinguished from the "Corporation Piece," and the Regents were generally portrayed as sitting in council. It was a Regent piece which Rembrandt was now commissioned to paint, and in its execution he put the top stone on the monument of his lasting fame. It is now universally acknowledged to be the greatest of Regent pieces, and is by many considered the most entirely successful effort of even Rembrandt's varied genius.

In the August of this year the faithful Hendrickje became seriously ill, and, fearing the worst, made her will. She recovered after a while to some extent, but only to linger another year. The exact date of her death is not on record, but it is supposed to have taken place in the autumn of 1662.

The legal proceedings against Rembrandt in

connection with his first wife's fortune had been cruelly long-drawn-out, and their final settlement was not until 1665, when Titus was allowed to take possession of what remained after the huge law expenses incurred had been paid. This residue was but 6,952 florins of a fortune estimated at 20,375 florins. However, it must have been a welcome addition to the little household, now consisting of but Rembrandt himself and Titus, with the little eleven-year-old Cornelia, Hendrickje's daughter. Two years later Titus married, his bride being a cousin on his mother's side, Magdalena van Uylenborch.

But the shadows were all too soon to close again around the ill-fated house; before the end of the year Titus died. A little posthumous daughter, sadly christened Titia, was born the following March, and a legal arrangement as to the respective shares to be left to this one grandchild and the young Cornelia is the last record that we have in which the painter's name appears, except the final one of all—the entry in the Westerkerk registry of deaths:

"Tuesday, 8 Oct., 1669.—Rembrandt van Ryn, painter, on the Rosengracht, opposite the Doolhof. Leaves two children."

He was buried in the Westerkerk, but even his poor worn-out body seems to have been allowed no rest; for when recently the pavement of the church was relaid, and the grave supposed to be his was uncovered, "no remains were to be found in the half-opened coffin."



Handwritten photo

Russ Museum, Amsterdam.

THE SANDICH OF THE DRAPERS' COMPANY 1651.

His poverty was complete at the time of his death. No reproach could be cast upon him for attempting to keep back anything from his creditors. An inventory drawn up shortly after the event states that he "left nothing of personal property but some linen and woollen garments and his painting materials."

No notice was taken of his demise by any of his contemporaries; neither brother artists nor men of letters seemed even to be aware of the fact. His decline into obscurity had been so rapid, and the depth reached so profound, that Amsterdam had forgotten his very existence.

This neglect is not so strange as, at this distance of time, it appears. Even when at the height of his prosperity, Rembrandt took no pains to please his public socially, and hence made few friends. He took no part in politics, joined no guild or corporation. Among artists his acquaintances were almost confined to the landscape painters—a new school with their tradition to make. Other painters, strongly under the influence of Italy, began early to mistrust the originality of his style. We read, for example, of one young artist, Jan van Baer, when debating with himself under which master he should place himself, dismissing the idea of Rembrandt in favour of Van Dyck, whose style he decided was likely "to be more durable."

Constantin Huygens seems to have been a great exception to his class, the aristocratic art patron of the day being in general so in-

clined to the princely manner of Rubens and Van Dyck as to be incapable of appreciating that of the People's master, Rembrandt van Ryn.

A fashionable painter writing within a generation of Rembrandt's death possibly expresses the general opinion of his time when he says: "The vulgar and prosaic aspects of a subject were the only ones he was capable of noting"; and though he admits that "the vigour and sincerity of his art preserves it from utter vulgarity," he concludes that his was a "manner founded on a delusion."

This being the condition of public opinion, it is not astonishing that his great-nephew has to record that "but a short time ago the ignorance of reputed connoisseurs was so gross with regard to the works of the mighty Rembrandt that it was possible to buy one of his portraits for sixpence"! But worse than neglect and lack of appreciation was to follow. As time passed on there gathered round his name a mass of legend which obtained credence until comparatively lately. It was told how he was of intemperate habits, a lover of pot-house society, licentious, even avaricious, and mean and ungenerous as regards his art methods. In short, a lying spirit went abroad and besmirched his reputation from base to summit.

In the middle of last century, happily, a reaction set in; careful research proved the falsity of the too-long-accepted legend, while the public capacity to appreciate art had, at a

still earlier date, so far enlarged as to be able to realize that art has more methods and styles than one. While admiring no less the masters of Italy, we are able, at the same time, to see wherein lies the greatness of Rembrandt—that, so far from his manner being “founded on a delusion,” it is the result of true vision, only his own, and not another’s.

THE ART OF REMBRANDT

IT will have been noticed in the foregoing short sketch that Rembrandt's life was singularly lacking in incident or adventure.

In days when Holland was the most stirring spot in all Christendom, when her sailors stopped short only of encircling the earth in their voyages of trade and discovery, Rembrandt stayed at home, his travels limited to the road between Leyden and Amsterdam. When artists deemed an Italian pilgrimage of prime necessity, Rembrandt refused to submit himself even to the influence of a Dutch "Italianizer," returning from Lastman's studio to his father's house, there "to study alone and in his own way."

His life was thus remarkable, not so much for what he did as for what he refrained from doing; and in that respect it was remarkable indeed, and stamps him as of a dominating originality. This strength and originality of character we find displayed in his art on every side and in every possible way.

True, he was Dutch, and only in Protestant and newly-emancipated Holland could he have been just such as he was; yet in Holland there

was but one Rembrandt. He was her highest development of art genius—the only one of her school to whom the word “supreme” could be applied.

Broadly speaking, his work covered the whole field of pictorial art, including portraits, subject compositions, and landscape. All three he executed in colour, and as frequently in black and white. Painting and etching seem to have occupied his hand ceaselessly, and one almost as much as the other. It is from this wide field that we gather most about the man himself: his life and thought are reflected in his art.

We see a love of almost everything that was to be found in his world of Nature, and these realized with the profoundest insight and the keenest sympathy. His catholicity of interest, indeed, sometimes even blunts his sensibility as to what is and what is not perfectly suited for artistic expression. Occasionally this painter of the tenderest emotions and subtlest sentiment drops into the full coarseness of his day and school. That curious callousness which we had occasion to note in some departments of his life is apparent from time to time in his art, though it must by no means be insisted upon as one of its prime characteristics.

As regards his subject compositions, we find that, with rare exceptions, they are all inspired by the Bible and Apocrypha. In order to appreciate them justly, it must always be borne in mind that Rembrandt was a Dutch Protes-

tant, and thus completely outside the pale of Catholic tradition in art. Sometimes his scriptural subjects inevitably coincide with some one or other of the old Catholic cycle, but for Rembrandt it was almost as if these latter had never been. He painted ever "in his own way."

Seeing things as, to him, they were, he endeavoured to put into them, to quote his own words, "as much life and reality as possible"—that is, to make the picture express in all its parts the dominating sentiment which he thought proper to it. Viewed from this point, it would almost seem that, as regards his subject, he desired primarily to express some given emotion, and turned to the Bible as the book with which he was most familiar to find an incident which lent itself to the expression of this emotion. Then, as he saw the scene through the medium of his Dutch imagination, full of its "life and reality," so he painted it.

In the Gallery of the Hague is a fine example of this treatment, *David Playing before Saul*. It is an unusually large canvas for a Rembrandt Bible subject, but the conception demands size. It is a tragic picture of solemn magnificent colouring. Saul and David alone are represented, and, looking at them, the very souls of both are made known to us. At the foot of the picture is David, a dark-haired Jewish youth, playing his harp, absorbed by the music which he creates. Saul, seated above him, is in torment as he listens; with one hand he



John the Baptist in the Church of the Holy Spirit

CHRIST HEALING THE SICK

Hospital, No. 4

clutches a curtain and draws it over half his face, hiding David from his view, and we see but his profile; worn and haggard it is with long mental and spiritual struggles, and now the moment has come for one fight more. The boy is there, in his power, unconscious of this temptation, the javelin is at his hand. There is no forced movement in either, both, in fact, are still, but of "life and reality"—yes, an absolute revelation of both.

So long as there is such revelation, Rembrandt appears to consider that he has achieved his prime end, and beauty of form is absolutely ignored. It is extraordinary that one of the most distinguished of portrait-painters should have almost entirely disregarded facial beauty in compositions of his own selection. In the *Saul and David*, for example, David is, as regards features, frankly an ugly lad, while Saul is hardly less unpleasing in appearance.

In an etching of *The Prodigal Son*, a positive triumph of expressive treatment, the faces of both father and son are almost repellently ugly; notwithstanding, as one carefully studies the plate, one is subtly made to enter into the heart of both, and feel for the moment the passion of forgiveness in that of the one, and of repentance in that of the other.

This introduces a further quality, and perhaps the most characteristic of Rembrandt's art, in which he proved himself a great originator in method, and has remained until this day an unrivalled master.

If we consider for a moment what had been done in European art before his time, we may perhaps realize more clearly the specially wonderful advance made by Rembrandt.

In any great gallery where examples of the earlier schools of painting are to be found, it will be seen that at first the chief concern has been to portray figures drawn in definite lines, in clear colours, against a flat background. Gradually these figures gained in expression by better drawing and modelling, and to the background was given life by landscape and perspective. Concurrently with these advances, the arrangement of line was studied so that all parts of a work might be brought into harmony with each other, and a great composition produced. "Composition of line" is the great achievement of the Tuscan School. Another school, the Venetian, occupied itself with colour rather than with pure line; its painters seem almost to have conceived their pictures first in colour, and effected composition as much by the distribution of their colour as by the arrangement of their lines. Line and colour are the two great distinguishing characteristics of these schools respectively, in each case conceived and studied in the clear light of the Italian atmosphere. There remains another great quality to be grasped in pictorial art, which was late in attracting attention in Italy, owing, no doubt, to the atmospheric conditions of that country, and which, comparatively speaking, was not carried very far by Italian

painters. This is the quality and effect of light contrasting with shadows, what artists call *chiaroscuro*.*

The possibilities in this direction seized upon the imagination of the painters north of the Alps, in Holland more particularly, where mist and rain are only too familiar, and much of life is perforce passed indoors, shadow forming a large proportion of the general effect. The Dutch painters threw their hearts into this study of, and search for, the essential qualities to be found in light concentrated in one point, or half obscured, or reflected on to some other object, and in shadows grading off into darkness. Among them all, the prince of experimenters and of masters in *chiaroscuro*, was Rembrandt van Ryn. It is possible to stand before a work of his and remain for minutes at a time in doubt as to whether the gleam seen across his canvas, be really part of the work or some actual stray sunbeam which has entered by an unnoticed window. Passing from the gleam of concentrated light on the canvas to the portions in shadow, we find that they are to the full as worthy of admiration as the beam of sunshine. Shadow is with this master not one thing, but a realm of unnumbered gradations, depth within depth, subdued lights revealed within the darkness, figures, motion and what not, all there, dim but visible, and in perfectly proportionate relation to the concen

* From the Italian words *chiaro*, light, and *oscuro*, dark.

trated point of light which first catches the eye. All this is no trick or illusion, dispelled when once familiarity with "Rembrandt effects" is gained, but a lasting beauty built up from marvellous study of the essential qualities of light in itself and in its effect on contiguous shadow.

Realism in chiaroscuro was, however, by no means Rembrandt's goal in his study of its nature. To him it was but a means, that by which, almost more than any other, he invested his work with its poetry, or its spiritual significance. An etching of *The Angel appearing to the Shepherds* illustrates this point forcibly. The angel—a not very graceful figure—appears in the clouds, with a crowd of little celestial attendants behind him. The shepherds, says the story, "were sore afraid," and so Rembrandt represents them with unflinching "reality and life." One stands startled by the apparition, one has sunk to his knees with hands extended, and a third is in full flight; while, with his Dutch literal imagination, he passes on the fear to the sheep and cows. The former look scared, but the cattle, true to their less phlegmatic nature, are running pell-mell away. As regards the figures here, and their line and action, the dignity of the plate is obviously menaced by this so literal conception; but the situation is saved by the chiaroscuro. This is the master's medium for informing his work with its proper spirit. It is a heavenly light which bathes the angel and his host, and the open field of earth

is shrouded with so desolate a contrasting shadow, revealing rather than hiding its nakedness and want, that the poetry of the tale and its inner significance are made abundantly clear; and this being established by the quality of the chiaroscuro, it is possibly even emphasized by the frightened non-comprehension of man and brute.

This rare grasp of chiaroscuro is apparent in every branch of Rembrandt's art—portraits, subject compositions, or landscapes. In his early years it is naturally somewhat tentative, but becomes firmer as his experience widens and his knowledge deepens.

It was rarely, as above noted, that the master strayed away from his favourite source of inspiration. On occasions, and these not with conspicuous success, he chose a classical subject. Once he was roused from his own world of art and home by a great political event, and sought to express in allegory his patriotic emotion. In the Rotterdam Museum is preserved the sketch, in *grisaille*, called *The Pacification of the Country*.

In 1648 was concluded the Peace of Westphalia, which put an end to the long struggle of the United Provinces against Spain. Amsterdam celebrated the event by splendid fêtes, and Rembrandt, in the glow of the hour, conceived a great picture, in which he portrayed allegorically the travail and birth of his country. To the left is Justice, dethroned and intimidated, shrinking behind her seat, holding her sword

but too enfeebled to use it. A lion lies on the ground before her, chained, holding under his paws seven lances, representing the Seven Provinces, but though fettered, he roars defiance. As it were in answer to the cry, knights arm themselves, issue from a fortress, and the discomfited enemy flies before them. There is a fine sweep in the line of the composition, falling in with the scheme of chiaroscuro. The armed figures of knights on horseback are very striking, and two lances raised athwart the group give admirable contrasting lines. The whole is the merest sketch, but enough is indicated to show that the art world of Amsterdam had offered to it a conception which might have been worked up into a great picture. It failed, however, to appreciate its opportunity. As the museum catalogue laconically remarks, "The sketch was not followed by an order."

Rembrandt's portraits range over the widest field of character and person; from the high to the lowest, the old to the very young. Generally they are life-size, though towards the end of his career there was a tendency to draw them larger. In the days of his popularity the best of citizen society overwhelmed him with its orders, and the series of his commissioned portraits shows us the old city life, the actual men and women who made possible in history the Rise of the Dutch Republic. They are not persons of specially aristocratic appearance nor of conspicuous beauty; but they have a distinc-

tion of their own, the outcome of strong purpose, intelligent—or it may be intellectual—effort, and conscious achievement. In men and women alike we find this dignity of worth and character, and what was in them of both Rembrandt knew unerringly how to portray.

In the great Corporation pieces of Franz Hals we are shown the outward appearance of militant Holland in the seventeenth century, a magnificent legacy of work to his country. Rembrandt probes deeper into "life and reality." He in his portraits shows us, in its nobility and in its limitations, the very Soul of the People.

One of the most admirable of this class of portraits is that of the Burgomaster Six, a young man who had evinced great friendship for the master, and in the days of his misfortunes was one of the faithful few who maintained an unbroken affection for him. Rembrandt seems to have concentrated all his art and skill in this painting, so as to give of his best to his friend. There is a touch of the Shakespearian spirit in the portrait, recalling the sonnets, the artist giving immortality to his friend and their friendship through his art. Still in the original Six mansion in Amsterdam, it may be visited and admired by all art lovers.

Rembrandt did not confine himself to the portrayal of persons in high position: throughout his career his interests were catholic. His very house was in the Jews' quarter, and the strongly-marked features of the

Nation had a great attraction for him. Beggars also and children—any face, in short, that possessed character drew his eye towards it, and from thumb-nail sketch to finished portrait the painter put on record what he saw.

From year to year we may trace his experiments and his achievements as a portrait painter, for the date of every extant work has been approximately ascertained. At first the work is marked by an almost anxious accuracy, but gradually the touch gets firmer, the effects bolder, and the figures stand, not necessarily shown up by any special light or against contrasting background, but as he alone knew how to create the appearance, in a luminous depth of transparent atmosphere, which is their own. They do not start out to the eye, but calmly stand within their frame, self-contained, dignified, in their own world of air and light and shadow, —a world of Rembrandt's making.

His Biblical subjects are occasionally on the same large scale as his portraits, the *Saul and David* above mentioned being an instance, but more often they are small. Sometimes, indeed, the figures are quite tiny, the greater part of the picture being taken up, it may be, with vast architectural fantasies or with landscape, each bathed in a grand scheme of chiaroscuro, a revelling in the play of shade and light and disappearing shadowy crowds, hardly visible at first sight, but, once seen, unmistakable as to action and intention.

One such miracle of chiaroscuro is to be found in the National Gallery—*The Woman taken in Adultery*. The effects are obtained in the vistas of a glorious temple of Gothic proportions and style, a glow of sunlight illuminating the principal group. *Shepherds at Night*, in the Dublin National Gallery, is a notable example of landscape setting. The shepherds are grouped in firelight, which is reflected in water near by; all around is darkness, but in the darkness are revealed black mountains silhouetted against darker sky, and beyond them distance after distance of further mountain and more distant sky. A faint suggestion of a gleam relieves this transparent blackness at one point, conceivably the harbinger of the coming angel. Of line and definite form there is the slightest possible for the picture to have any articulate meaning at all, the whole being a poem of light as revealed in the darkness.

In this example of the shepherds the "subject" is, indeed, almost swallowed up in the landscape, or, rather, both are in the effect of chiaroscuro. This sometimes occurs also in his pure landscapes. In this third class of painting he restricts himself for the most part to his own country. For the backgrounds of his "subjects" he often builds up a fanciful landscape, half imagined, half borrowed from the traditional Italian treatment; but for genuine landscape he generally keeps close to home, his own Holland proving to him a source

of unfailing interest, and as he saw it he shows it to us. "He has a profound sense of reality," writes M. Cherbuliez, "yet, by his way of treating light, he gives a certain magical, supernatural quality to the most common realities, so that his works are at once passages from nature and fantastic tales, the fairy visions of a great soul."

Of Rembrandt as a colourist it must be remarked that he aimed primarily at richness of quality; preoccupied as he was with problems of chiaroscuro, his desire was rather to produce a glowing and harmonious effect than one of great variety in colour. In his earlier days—in fact, until his bankruptcy and the consequent sale of all his properties—he was fond of introducing into his work fantastic dresses and fine jewels, the glow and glitter of which lent additional richness to his productions. Later, when he had none of these possessions to draw upon, his colour schemes became more simple, but no less glowing; for dipping his brush, as it were, into light itself, he produced effects of golden browns and yellows grading off into red, shown up against a luminous gray, that in their subdued glory are as beautiful as those of his earlier and more varied colouring.

On this matter of Rembrandt's colour M. Michel supplies some interesting details. "This master," he writes, "careful in every element of his art, was specially jealous of the composition and preparation of his ingredients. He procured the rarest and most precious woods

for his panels, and was equally particular as to the oils and varnishes he employed. The problem of the vehicles he used to spread his colours or to continue an interrupted work without prejudice to its solidity and freshness is still unsolved. Lacquers brought from the Dutch Indies had doubtless increased the resources of the palette in Rembrandt's time. Sandrart extolled the excellence of the colours then manufactured in Amsterdam, making special mention of a certain imperishable white and of various ochres which retained their transparence in shadow." Be this latter as it may, the wares of the Amsterdam colourmen were doubtless to be purchased by all artists alike, but of them all Rembrandt alone painted in the Rembrandt manner.

Living, as we have seen, a life of hardly paralleled absorption in his art, his output of work was prodigious. Hardly any European gallery of note is without one or more works from his hand, while of late years a considerable number has passed over to the United States. Strange to say, there are comparatively few in Holland, a bare thirty; in England we have over 180. Besides the paintings, it must be remembered there are the only less valuable etchings, the most important collections of these being in the British Museum, the Rijks Museum, Amsterdam, the Louvre, Berlin, Vienna, and Frankfurt.

Rembrandt had pupils, but he formed no school. He added enormously to the sum of

artistic expression almost to the extent of a new world. But his methods and his genius were so individual, not only immeasurably apart from, but beyond those of other men, that he remains alone on his own height.

OUR ILLUSTRATIONS

OUR illustrations are chosen with a view to being as representative of Rembrandt's wide field of work as is possible within the limits of so small a volume as the present.

1. A portrait of the artist himself has its place in such a selection on two accounts—first for its personal interest, and second as being an example of that long series of self studies, already referred to, which began with his earliest years and closed only with his life. The one here reproduced is that in the National Gallery, and therefore the easiest to examine at first hand, with a view to realizing by actual inspection what words can, after all, do so little to make clear.

This portrait was painted in 1640, when the artist was thirty-four, eight years after he had made his great position in Amsterdam by *The Anatomy Lesson*, and two before he destroyed it by the painting of *The Night Watch*. The year previously he had removed with Saskia to his new house, so we see him here as he appeared in the height of his prosperity, his well-born wife by his side, his band of admiring students established on the upper floor, commissions in

sufficient number coming in, troubles unthought of, and friends as many as he had time to enjoy. His face is hardly handsome, nor of a distinguished type. But this portrait cannot be considered one that does it full justice; the flat cap hides the brow, which other portraits show to have been lofty and noble, nor has he here the keen, deep-seeing expression of the eyes which elsewhere is very conspicuous. In none of Rembrandt's portraits is he shown as possessing much beauty of feature, but in many we see the inward nobility of mind manifested through and in spite of the almost peasant type of face. This portrait is remarkable for being the only one of himself painted between the years 1636 and 1642; during these happy years Saskia replaced himself as his ever complaisant model, and in this instance he seems to have painted himself, after all, more as a study of picturesque effect than of character.

He is evidently robed from his stores of rich stuffs and garments; the fur, the velvet and embroidery are not the ordinary work-a-day clothing of his time. He is apparently posing to himself for some fancy character, or colour-scheme, or what not; notwithstanding which, the picture shows his characteristic manner of portrait painting, that of informing his subject, even where unhandsome, with a certain quiet dignity, the figure resting within its own luminous atmosphere, dark, yet having a living glow held within it.

2. The *Portrait of Saskia* is one painted the

year before her death. Hers is a gentle, almost childlike face, even in this last year, and we see her in this instance decked out as her husband in his fond extravagance loved to see her. This, like that of Rembrandt, must be looked upon as somewhat of a fancy portrait. He has dressed her and posed her once again as he had done so many times before in his studio, just for his and her own pleasure, and to work out some problem of rich effect.

3. *The Shipbuilder and his Wife*, now in Buckingham Palace, was painted in 1633, the year preceding that in which he executed *The Anatomy Lesson*. It thus is representative of his style at the time when Amsterdam held him in highest esteem, and was about to overwhelm him with commissions.

When speaking generally of the art of Rembrandt, it was pointed out how the series of his commissioned portraits showed us old Amsterdam, as it were, living again before us. From this point of view perhaps no more representative single work could be given than this of the old shipbuilder and his wife.

The very existence of the Dutch Republic depended on its ships. Its herring fleet had been one of the chief sources of wealth in older days, and from it had been developed successively its navy and its mercantile marine, the right and the left hand respectively of the Republic's power. In *The Night Watch*, as above remarked, we see Rembrandt's presentation of militant Holland; in *The Syndics*, to be

discussed later, we shall see the typical traders. Here we have the marine architect, one of those whose imagination and science evolved out of the old herring fleet, the forms, and estimated the character of build necessary for ocean sailing, and for active fight. Lightness, speed, endurance, capacity, practical qualities of every kind had to be thought out and created in these seventeenth-century Dutch ships, and here we see before us one of the shipbuilders. A thoughtful face he has, indicating that practical imagination which could foresee possibilities, supply needs—in short, create the new thing which the new day demanded. Intent on his problem, he turns to his wife, only half able to disengage his mind from it, to receive his letter. She, quite as capable in her special domain as he is in his, has no mind to waste his time nor her own. The letter given, she will leave him undisturbed; her hand is on the latch—indeed, has never left it. We have a complete picture of the life and mutual relations of the two old people, their characters, their work, and the quiet, life-long confidence established between them. Rembrandt reveals it all. The shipbuilder and his wife become our friends as we study the master's presentation of them. In the dresses of the two we see the ordinary costume of the period, quiet and sombre, which the painter does nothing to modify. He takes it as it is, and leaves the pair in their dark panelled room with its small window; but through the aperture he has

charmed a beam of sunlight, which bathes them in its glow and makes the shadows deep transparencies in which the eye seeks form and detail, and finds them, glorified by the medium in which they rest.

4. To the next year, 1634, belongs the portrait of *The Old Lady*, now in the National Gallery. Rembrandt seems to have had a great liking for portraits of this class, and was specially happy in their execution. His many studies from his mother may have influenced his taste, but be that as it may, his series of portraits of old women is particularly interesting. He has a marvellous gift, while in no way smoothing the wrinkles or flattering the sunken features, of impressing them with the character and dignity which is proper to old age. Our illustration is a fine example of his treatment. The old lady's is a time-worn, much-lined face, but it is full of her own history; we see that it is her life which has made it what it is; her character lies behind her many wrinkles, the one reveals the other—in short, *The Old Lady* is one of Rembrandt's portraits.

5. The story of the painting of *The Night Watch* has already been to some extent dealt with. So intimately is Rembrandt's life bound up with his art that it is almost impossible to dissociate them. But in this case the picture itself has had a history of its own; it is not now as it was when first placed in the Hall of the Civic Guard. A small contemporary copy of

it in the National Gallery shows us the extent of the original composition. When removed from the Hall of the Musketeers it was found too large for its new position, and consequently was cut on both sides to make it fit the space it was to occupy. This mutilation accounts for the apparently curious treatment of the drummer, his head and arm only being visible, and the fact that only a half of the body of the musketeer to the left is to be seen. The very title by which the painting is known is the outcome of the carelessness with which for years it was treated. Blackened with accumulated dirt, its shadows were deepened and its lights darkened, hence the legend arose that its action took place at night. Thence followed the questions: If so, what was the light? whence did it shine? were the musketeers inside or out? In short, few paintings have been more discussed and disputed over than this *Sortie of the company of Captain Banning Cocq*.

Authorities are now agreed that the action takes place outside, the company being in the act of leaving their hall; that the light is sunlight, treated, however, in Rembrandt's manner, not diffused, but concentrated, pouring down into the group and illuminating just those forms and features that are in the line of its rays. Some are of opinion that the moment chosen is not that of a call to arms, but that the company is on its way to a shooting contest, the cock hung to the girdle of the little girl

being the prize destined for the successful competitor.

Among all the criticisms made on this work, perhaps the sanest and most sympathetic is that by M. Fromentin in his volume entitled "*Les maitres d'autrefois.*" As an introduction to this and other great works of Rembrandt, and, indeed, to the whole school of Holland, this little collection of essays can be hardly too warmly recommended.

6. *The Syndics of the Drapers' Company* is generally considered Rembrandt's masterpiece, a work in which his greatest qualities on all hands are brought together and displayed in their highest degree.

We cannot tell whether pressure was brought to bear on him or not as regards his composition—whether the drapers stipulated that he was not to treat them as he had done the Civic Guard—or he himself laid a restraining hand upon his imagination, and resolved to treat the serious traders with severe reticence of style. Be that as it may, the result has justified the means. As types of old Amsterdam society the five traders are admirable—traders emphatically, with nothing of the aristocrat about them, and yet with an air of real distinction. This was the type of man that built up the high commercial reputation of Holland in her great days—a reputation for probity and capacity. The men have their character writ large upon them. But this is not all that the painting displays. As M. Fromentin points

out, Rembrandt was, as it were, two men with regard to his art. The first Rembrandt "subordinates himself to his subject," to the task of painting reality, of reading and portraying the character of his sitter. The second Rembrandt did not so subordinate himself, but, revelling in his own conception of the subject, he cared little for exact study of his model; using it merely as a starting-point, he painted from it his own poem of light or colour or what not.

In the drapers we have a complete balance of these two forces. "The two men who for so long had divided the strength of his spirit grasp hands in this hour of perfect union."

The sitters are taken as they are, in their sombre, workaday dress, and are grouped with nothing more than characteristic pose and gesture as they discuss the accounts and dealings of their guild. The bareheaded servant standing behind brings variety, and serves as contrast to the broad-brimmed hats of his masters. All is real as life. Rembrandt has suppressed himself in order to represent his models with absolute truth and penetration.

In the rich red table-cloth we have the colour-note struck, the side in full light being, further, a masterly piece of texture painting. The whole scheme of chiaroscuro is sternly held in harmony with the character of the commission; the fantastic and unearthly is conspicuously absent, the painter having used his powers to produce perfection absolutely within the proper limits of his subject. Not

unearthly, yet such as only Rembrandt could charm on to canvas is the light which streams in through the window, marvellous in its subdued intensity. The seated company is bathed in it, while the richness of its quality brings out in the panels and plaster of the walls a scheme of golden browns dashed with red and gleams of gray which, blending with the colour-note of the table-cloth, make a general effect of complete unity and achievement.

Of all Regent pieces in the school of Holland, none rivals *The Syndics of the Drapers*, as *The Night Watch* surpasses all other Corporation pieces and *The Anatomy Lesson* all other "pieces" of that order. It was seldom that his public commissioned him to paint these fashionable pieces, yet on the rare occasions when it did avail itself of his services, Rembrandt excelled all contemporaries in the three specially characteristic subjects of his school.

7. *Christ Healing the Sick* is an example of the master's etching, and is generally held to be his finest plate. Besides its interest as an etching, it may here be taken as also illustrative of his treatment of the Biblical subject, full of "reality and life," and with still further qualities. This plate has, like *The Night Watch*, a popular title, that of "The Hundred-Guilder Piece," from a tradition—little likely to be true—that Rembrandt sold prints of it for that sum. The execution of this plate was the principal labour of the year 1649. In few of his works has Rembrandt used his power over chiaroscuro

with greater effect, in order to bring out the poetry and deep significance of his conception. From the depth of shadows, velvety in their blackness, yet all transparent, comes sorrowing humanity from far and near, burdened with all ills of body and mind. In the centre, the light streaming on to Him, and raying out from Him, is the Great Consoler. On the other hand, in a clear light, is an opposing group—sceptics and questioners—of those that, being “whole, need not the Physician.” A deep and beautiful significance is added to the conception by the disposal of the sceptics and false teachers in the full daylight, and of the sick and afflicted supplicants in dense shadow—“an antithesis superb alike in its moral truth and artistic effect,” as Vosmaer says, and due to “a perception of life and art of the utmost truth and delicacy” (Michel’s “Life of Rembrandt”).

8. *The Three Trees* is another etching, and may also be taken as an example of Rembrandt’s treatment of pure landscape. This plate is dated 1643, the year following that of Saskia’s death and the luckless painting of *The Night Watch*. It would be impossible not to perceive the mastery evinced in this small work. In it he has portrayed at once the intimate character of the country, and caught the very mood of the passing hour, impressing both on to his plate, together with who knows what of his own passion of storm and unrest. We feel, while looking at the plate, the driving rain as it sweeps away, the pause between the gusts



Houghton's photo.

From the clearing in the British Museum.

III THREE TREES.

of wind, the expectancy of the clear sky over the sea-line as it waits on the tempest inland. Yet when we examine the features of the scene which expresses all this, we find but a flat plain with what is presumably Amsterdam in the distance, the level lines of fields, a stagnant pool, and three trees with their leaves just turned up as the wind touches them. What could be simpler? And yet what is not told of turmoil and disturbance?

This plate belongs to the period when Rembrandt drew the inspiration for his landscapes from his own country. A pupil of his, Hoogstraaten by name, who always held his master's teaching in great reverence, wrote to his brother, who was desirous of visiting Rome, in the following words: "You will find in your own country so many beauties that your life will be too short for their comprehension and expression, and Italy, with all her loveliness, will be useless to you if you are unable to render the nature around you." M. Michel surmises, and with much reason, that in this advice of his pupil we hear an echo of Rembrandt's own teaching. In *The Three Trees*, so simple and homelike in its elements, yet revealing in them so many beauties, we see this teaching exemplified.

WHERE THE ARTIST'S CHIEF WORKS ARE TO BE FOUND

HOLLAND.

In the Rijks Museum, Amsterdam, are eight examples, including *The Night Watch*, *The Syndics*, *The Jewish Bride*, and the *Portrait of Elizabeth Bas*. This latter is certainly one of the most striking of his portraits of old ladies.

In the Six Collection, also in Amsterdam, are four examples, including, besides the famous portrait of the Burgomaster, a most charming portrait of his mother, Anna Vymer, painted in 1641, in the master's earlier manner.

The Hague, in the Mauritshuis, is *The Anatomy Lesson*, *David playing before Saul*, and a number of others, including some of his early studies from members of his own family.

Rotterdam, in Boyman's Museum, *The Pacification of the Country*.

THE BRITISH ISLES.

In Buckingham Palace, *The Shipbuilder and his Wife*, *The Burgomaster Pancras and his Wife*, now called *Rembrandt and Saskia*, and five others.

In the National Gallery are seventeen examples, including *The Woman taken in Adultery*, three other Bible subjects, a landscape, and a very representative selection of portraits.

The Wallace Collection, Hertford House. Here are no fewer than eleven examples, some of them exceptionally fine. There are two fine portrait family

groups, painted in the same year as *The Anatomy Lesson*, a singularly striking portrait of a young negro, known as *The Black Archer*, painted in 1640, while in *The Unmerciful Servant* we have a late example of the Biblical subject, with figures drawn life-size; the date is about 1660. The face of the unmerciful servant himself is a magnificent piece of character painting. One other portrait is said to represent Titus.

A large number of other works are in private hands both in London and throughout the country.

There is one in the National Gallery, Edinburgh; in the Corporation Galleries, Glasgow, are seven; and in the National Gallery, Dublin, four.

AUSTRIA.

The Imperial Museum, Vienna, has seven; and in the collection of Prince Liechtenstein are five; and a number of other private persons possess single works.

BELGIUM.

The museums of both Antwerp and Brussels contain several works; two others are in private hands.

FRANCE.

There is a very large number in the hands of private collectors, while twenty are in the Louvre alone. One of these, in the Salon Carré, is a portrait of Hendrickje Stoffels. *Christ at Emmaus*, also in the Salon Carré, is one of the most profound in insight and delicate in poetical treatment of all his numerous Biblical subjects. Of it M. Fromentin writes: "A marvel which may be counted among the *chefs d'œuvre* of the master," and of his treatment of the Christ as among "things inspired we know not whence, and produced we know not how—all is priceless." Its date is 1648. *The Good Samaritan* is another highly characteristic Biblical subject.

GERMANY.

There is hardly a town of note in Germany without one or more works by Rembrandt in its gallery.

The Royal Museum of Berlin possesses nineteen, among them *The Money-Changer*, the master's earliest extant work.

The Museum of Cassel possesses twenty works.

Dresden possesses sixteen, one of them a striking portrait group of Rembrandt and Saskia together; the figures are life-size to the knees. The two are posed and dressed in most fantastic fashion, as though belonging to some royal Court. Rembrandt wears plumed hat and sword, Saskia the richest robe with jewels on neck and hair. She sits on her husband's knee, his arm being round her waist, while the other hand holds a huge glass of wine. A rich feast is spread on a table to one side. Anything more unlike what we may imagine the actual home-life of the Van Ryn family to be could hardly have been drawn. The picture must be looked on rather as a purely fanciful portrayal of husband and wife posing for the nonce as prince and princess or cavalier and lady, while at the same time giving the painter the opportunity to study the richness of stuffs and glitter of jewels.

At Munich are ten of the master's works, and among them *The Descent from the Cross* and *The Elevation of the Cross*, purchased by Prince Frederick Henry.

ITALY.

In Italy, as might perhaps be expected, there are very few—eight in all—in the galleries of Florence, Milan, and Turin respectively.

RUSSIA.

In the Hermitage, St. Petersburg, is a collection of no fewer than thirty-eight, almost without exception portraits and Biblical subjects, some of the greatest value and importance.

SPAIN.

- Spain significantly has but one, in the Prado, Madrid.

SWEDEN.

In the Royal Museum, Stockholm, are nine; one of them, *The Conspiracy of Claudius Civilis*, a rare historical subject, is supposed to be but a mutilated portion of what was originally a very large and important work.

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA.

No fewer than twenty-nine are now in private hands in various parts of the States, while four are in the Metropolitan Museum of New York.

CHRONOLOGY OF THE ARTIST'S LIFE

- 1606. Birth of Rembrandt, July 15.
- 1620. Entered Leyden University, and, later, Swanenborch's studio.
- 1623. Entered Lastman's studio.
- 1624. Returned to Leyden.
- 1627. Date of first known pictures.
- 1630. His father died.
- 1631. Left Leyden for Amsterdam.
- 1632. Painted *The Anatomy Lesson*.
- 1634. Married Saskia van Uylenborch.
- 1639. Purchased the house (68) in Joden Breestraat.
- 1641. His son Titus born.
- 1642. Saskia died, and *The Night Watch* painted.
- 1649. Hendrickje Stoffels first heard of.
- 1656. Declared bankrupt.
- 1658. His property sold.
- 1660. Association formed by Hendrickje and Titus.
- 1661. Last known etching and *The Syndics* painted.
- 1662. Hendrickje (probably) died.
- 1668. Titus married and died.
- 1669. Rembrandt died.

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